

10-1-1967

The Latin Translator of The Cherrie and the Slae

Mark Dilworth

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dilworth, Mark (1967) "The Latin Translator of The Cherrie and the Slae," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, 77–82.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol5/iss2/2>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

MARK DILWORTH

**The Latin Translator of
*The Cherrie and the Slae***

In 1631 there appeared in print a Latin verse translation of Alexander Montgomerie's *The Cherrie and the Slae*. As the title is transcribed in full in easily accessible works,¹ only the essential part need be given here:

Cerasum et Sylvestre Prunum . . . Authore Primo Nobili Domino
Alexandro Montgomrio Scoto Poeta . . . in latinos versus trans-
latum. Per T.D.S.P.M.B.P.P. . . . Arctauni Francorum Typis
Fleischmannicis. Anno M.DC.XXXI.

The translator is always assumed to be Thomas Dempster, the well-known author. My purpose here is to argue that the initials represent Thomas Duff, a monk of the Scottish Benedictine abbey at Würzburg in Franconia.

Not long ago I edited five Latin poems by Thomas Duff on the career and death of Montgomerie,² in one of which Duff said that Montgomerie intended to join the Würzburg monastery, that St. Benedict was calling him to Würzburg. The name used for Würzburg was *Artaunum*, a neo-classical designation of the town.³ The Latin version of *The Cherrie and the Slae*, therefore, was published in Würzburg.

There are many arguments in favour of Duff's authorship as against Dempster's. These will be listed, but it would be as well, first

¹ A. Geddie, *A Bibliography of Middle Scots Poets* S.T.S. (Edinburgh, 1912), 340-41; *The Poems of Alexander Montgomerie*, ed. J. Cranstoun, S.T.S. (Edinburgh, 1887), liii; *Bibliographia Aberdonensis*, ed. J. F. K. Johnstone and A. W. Robertson, Third Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1929), p. 253.

² "New Light on Alexander Montgomerie," *The Bibliothek*, IV (1965), 230-35, to which the reader is referred for Duff's career and the Würzburg background. The significance of the poems was discussed by Mrs. Helena M. Shire, "Alexander Montgomerie: The opposition of the court to conscience," *SSL*, III (1966), 144-150.

³ E. Stahleder, "Artaunum — ein alter Name für Würzburg," in *Mainfränkisches Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kunst*, X (1958), 1-19.

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

of all, to consider the most cogent argument in detail. At the end of the 1631 Latin edition are two poems to the Trinity, while in Duff's autograph volume of poems is one which greatly resembles these. A comparison of the texts makes this clear. The first of the two poems in the 1631 edition will be given, then Duff's manuscript poem.

Sanctissimae Et Individuae Triados

Invocatio paraphrastica, ex alio idiomate.⁴

Sacra Monas, Triados suprema essentia, simplex
Ens: sine principio fineque semper idem.
Aeternum, quo victa cadit victoria, VERBUM
In cruce vim perimens mortis et arma stygis.
Omnia contemplans oculus, Sapientia, Lumen;
Alpha, O, idem; ortus, terminus; arrha, lucrum:
Nulli par solus, solus pare nemine gaudens:
Immotus, propriis astra movendo globis.
Usia una; triplex in hypostase forma creatrix:
Sola Creatoris nescia, sola sciens.
Perpes Amor; stabilis Pietas; Laus iusta; quieto
Dirige sollicitum calle, salutis iter.
Constabili, succende, crema mihi spemque fidemque
Caelitus, ut maneat tu mihi solus Amor.

Ad Sanctissimam Trinitatem⁵

Maxima, Principio prior, existentia rerum,
Aeternae Triadis monas, Unice Trine Monarcha.
Vox aeterna parans victa Victrice Triumphum
Morte, premens Styga Vitali super arbore vincens.
Quandoquidem est tua cognitio, Sapientia, lumen,
Omne, Jehova, Alpha atque omega et in omnibus Unus,
Nulli idem compar, nullo tibi compare gaudens,
Immotus qui cuncta moves, terramque polumque
Incontenta tenens Deitas: es erasque futura es,
Fine carens, bonitas pia mitis iusta perennis,
Conditor alme tibi non condite, supplico rectum

⁴ Punctuation is given as in Cranstoun's edition (p. 327) which improves considerably on the original. Cranstoun attributes the poem to Dempster.

⁵ Würzburg University Library, M.ch.q.62, fol. 52rv. Some punctuation has been added.

THE CHERRIE AND THE SLAE

Instrue me fidei callem tibi, summa potestas
Desuper accelerans: Confirma, accende, tuere,
Spemque fidemque meam: sed Amor super omnia regnet.

The poems have fourteen lines each, in couplets and hexameters, respectively. Clearly, though neither is explicitly called such, both are translations of Montgomerie's sonnet to the Trinity:⁶

Supreme Essence, beginning, unbegun,
Ay Trinall Ane, ane undevydit Three,
Eternall Word, wha victorie hes wun
Ouir death, ouir hell, triumphing on the trie,
Forknavlege, Wysdome, and All-seing Ee,
Iehovah, Alpha and Omega, All,
Lyk unto nane, nor nane lyk unto Thee,
Unmovt wha movis the rounds about the Ball,
Contener unconteind; is, was and sall
Be, sempiternall, mercifull, and just.
Creator uncreatit, nou I call.
Teich me Thy treuth, since unto Thee I trust,
Incres, confirme, and strenthen from aboue
My faith, my hope, and, by the lave, my loue.

One can see that on the whole the manuscript poem keeps closer than does the printed Latin poem to Montgomerie's original, particularly in lines 9-11. Apart from these three lines, however, the two Latin poems are strikingly similar, so much so that one doubts whether this can be due solely to their being translations of the same text. One is led to suppose that they were composed by the same person.

The second printed poem, consisting of twenty-one hexameters, is not a translation of Montgomerie's sonnet at all. In spite of this, some lines are very like lines in the manuscript poem, as the following comparison shows. The last four lines of the printed poem are given first, then lines 4, 7, 11 and 14 of the manuscript poem.

Et mortem et styga vitali super arbore vinxit.
Nulli compar honor, nullo laus compare gaudens.
Conditor et Soter non condite, perfice firma
Spemque Fidemque, tui sed Amor super omnia regnet.
Morte, premens Styga Vitali super arbore vincens

⁶ Text from Cranstoun's edition (p. 89) with spelling unaltered apart from initial v.

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Nulli idem compar, nullo tibi compare gaudens
Conditor alme tibi non condite, supplico rectum
Spemque fidemque meam: sed Amor super omnia regnet

Coincidence cannot possibly explain these similarities. The lines in the manuscript poem are where they are and what they are because they are translations of the corresponding lines in Montgomerie's original. They are therefore the first in order of time and have been lifted out of their context and adapted. In each case they are more like the second printed poem than are the corresponding lines in the first printed poem; therefore this last is not the source of them.

Even if the great similarity of Duff's manuscript poem to the first printed poem might be explained by their common original (Montgomerie's sonnet) plus a good measure of coincidence, the fact that it provided the ending for the second printed poem cannot be so explained. If one takes the three poems together and remembers that all three are found in Würzburg at roughly the same time, the conclusion is inescapable that they are connected in their composition. And since Duff's autograph poem is prior to at least one of the printed poems, it follows that the author of all three is Thomas Duff.

The arguments in favour of Duff's authorship of *Cerasum et Sylvestre Prunum* can now be marshalled.

I. The book was printed at Duff's place of residence in Franconia, whereas Dempster's later life was spent in Bologna.⁷ This by itself is no argument, however, for George Conn, another Scottish Catholic expatriate in Italy had his *Vita Mariae Stuartae* printed in 1624 at this same Würzburg press, Fleischmann's, as well as at Rome.⁸

II. Duff was alive and at Würzburg in 1631, but if the Latin version was Dempster's work, we must hold that it was preserved in manuscript for some years after his death in 1625 and then published in another country with those initials instead of his name. Some explanation is called for. Dempster's posthumous *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum*, published at Bologna in 1627, gave his name.⁹

III. There is the testimony dating from the years 1696-1706 that a

⁷ For him see *DNB*.

⁸ *DNB*; *Bibliographia Aberdonensis*, 216.

⁹ *Bibliographia Aberdonensis*, 234. The Bannatyne Club reprint (1829) gives a facsimile of the title-page.

THE CHERRIE AND THE SLAE

Scottish religious house on the continent produced the Latin version. It says that *The Cherrie and the Slae* was "turned into Latin Verses, with the Same number of foot and unisons as in the Original; A stupendious work indeed! fitt for the acute witts, of that Scottish friary (beyond our Seas) which undertook it:"¹⁰ This fits the Würzburg monastery, though technically it was not a friary as Benedictines are not friars.

IV. There is the testimony of the late seventeenth-century chronicle of the Würzburg monastery that Duff left poems in both print and manuscript.¹¹ Poems of his were indeed printed in the eighteenth century but I was unable, in spite of diligent search, to find any printed in the seventeenth century. This Latin version could be the missing work referred to.

V. Although Dempster had a remarkable facility for improvising Greek and Latin verse,¹² is this Latin version the sort of thing he went in for? It is certainly typical of Duff. Anyone who doubts Duff's passion for versification and verbal games (acrostics, chronograms, and so on) in Latin should examine his autograph volume of poems in Würzburg University Library.

VI. Dempster's interest in Montgomerie was slight. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica* he mentioned Montgomerie but briefly, saying that he knew little about him and giving his date of death as 1591.¹³ Duff, on the other hand, was intensely interested in Montgomerie and composed five poems on him and his connection with Würzburg, which contain a great deal of information about Montgomerie's career and death.

VII. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica* Dempster called *The Cherrie and the Slae*, since he was writing in Latin, *Cerasus et Vaccinium*. Clearly he could not have embarked on the *Cerasum et Sylvestre Prunum* when he compiled the posthumously published *Historia Ecclesiastica*, or he would not have given it so different a title.

VIII. The preceding arguments show that Duff was more likely

¹⁰ Geddie, *op. cit.* 349.

¹¹ Würzburg University Library, M.ch.q.56, fol. 36r.

¹² See *DNB*.

¹³ Bannatyne Club reprint, II, 496; extract in Geddie, *op. cit.* 345-46. The date 1591 is hardly a misprint, as is suggested by George Stevenson in *Poems of Alexander Montgomerie, Supplementary Volume S.T.S.* (Edinburgh, 1910), 284-85, for it is found also in Dempster's *Nomenclatura* (1622), extracted from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

than Dempster to have composed the Latin version and that recognition of Duff's authorship clears up several difficulties. The fact that the 1631 edition adds Duff's two poems on the Trinity takes one further: it establishes a direct connection between Duff and the Latin version. How did two poems by Duff, living in Würzburg at the time, come to be added without acknowledgement if it was a composition of the deceased Dempster? Duff might possibly have prepared the Latin version for the press; why then did he not put Dempster's name on the title-page? Far more likely, it was Duff who composed the Latin version himself.

The Latin translation was made, according to the title-page, "in gratiam . . . D. Alexandri Brussii capitanei cohortis peditum Scotorum, Domini de Kinkawil." Alexander Bruce is found in 1631 being confirmed in possession of the lands of Kyncavill in the county of Linlithgow.¹⁴ I have seen no mention of him in Duff's manuscripts, but it might be fruitful to look for some connection of Bruce with Würzburg and Duff—or, of course, with Bologna and Dempster.

What do the initials T.D.S.P.M.B.P.P. stand for? To interpret them one needs ingenuity rather than logic, and the interpretation will have more or less plausibility rather than cogency. David Irving worked out what they could mean if they referred to Dempster.¹⁵ If they refer to Duff, S is surely *Scotus*, and P could well be *Poeta*; *Scotus Poeta* is how Montgomerie is described on the title-page. M.B.P. suggests *Monachus Benedictinus Professus*. The final P could then very naturally be *Presbyter*. We would thus have: Thomas Duff, Scotsman and Poet, a professed Benedictine monk and priest.

FORT AUGUSTUS, SCOTLAND

¹⁴ *Registrum Magni Sigilli* 1620-33, 633.

¹⁵ *The Lives of the Scottish Poets* (Edinburgh, 1804), II, 191.